

Tim and the Hidden People

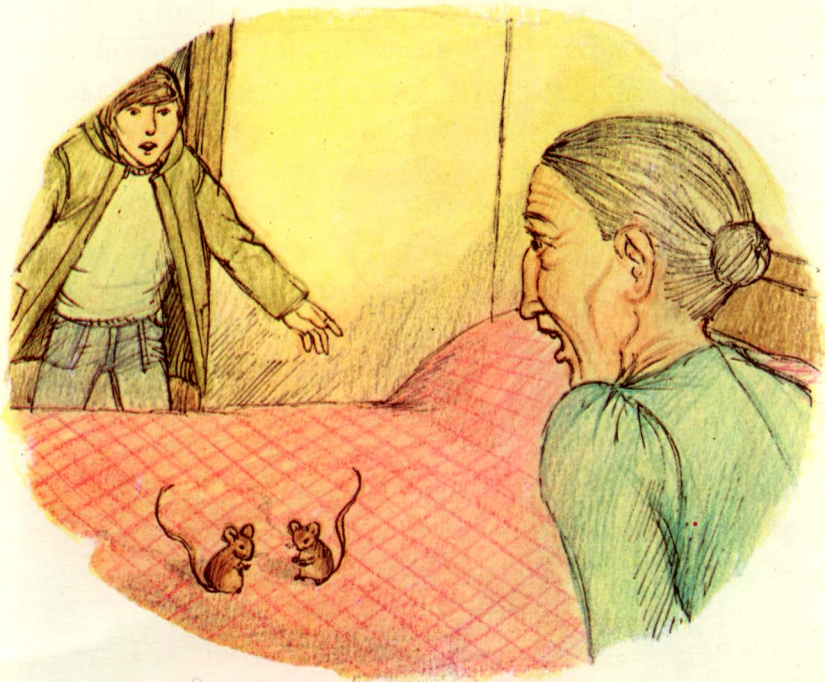
Tim in Trouble

Sheila K. McCullagh

Illustrated by Pat Cook



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ARNOLD-WHEATON



Tim was dreaming. He dreamt that he had found a large horse, and taken it home. Somehow or other, he had got the horse upstairs to his bedroom. In his dream, the horse could talk to him. But all the horse would say was: "I'm hungry. I'm very hungry."

Tim turned over, and his elbow hit the floor. He opened his eyes and sat up. For a second he wasn't sure where he was, and then he remembered that he was lying on the floor of his bedroom. There was no horse there, but he heard the words again.

"I'm hungry. I'm very hungry."

A boy was sitting on the end of Tim's bed, talking to a strange-looking girl with long, black hair.

Tim remembered. He was looking after two strange children for Melinda, the safe witch. "Just for a day or two," Melinda had said. Just until Melinda could find someone to take them north to their grandfather.

"Hallo, Tim," said Nicola, tossing back her hair and smiling at him. "Somebody's frying bacon. We can smell it."

Tim got up slowly. He felt a bit stiff, after a night on the hard floor.

"That's Aunt May," he said, "She's cooking Miss Miff's breakfast."

"Do you have bacon for breakfast?" asked Jeremy.

"No," said Tim. "Miss Miff has it. We have bread and jam. I'll go and get it."

Tim splashed his face and washed his hands in the basin on the table.

"You wait here," he said, as he pulled a comb through his hair. "I'll soon be back."

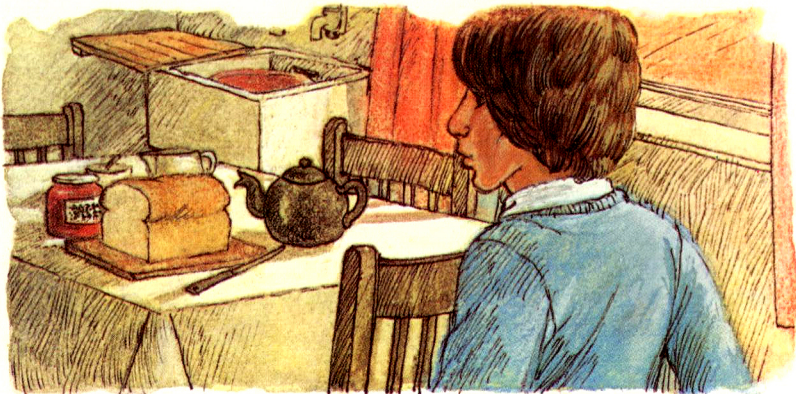
Tim opened the door, and ran downstairs. He met Aunt May in the hall. She was carrying a tray, with Miss Miff's breakfast on it. Miss Miff always had breakfast in bed, and Aunt May cooked it, and took it in to her. There were two eggs and four slices of bacon on a plate. Miss Miff always ate a lot. Tim often wondered how she stayed so thin.

The smell of the bacon made him feel hungry, too.

"You go and start your breakfast, Tim," said Aunt May. "I'm just taking this to Miss Miff."

"All right," said Tim.

He ran down the stairs to the kitchen in the basement. There was a loaf of bread, some jam, and a pot of tea on the table.





Tim cut some slices of bread, and made jam sandwiches. He put them in a paper bag, and slipped the bag under his sweater. He ran upstairs again, just as Aunt May came out of Miss Miff's room.

"I'll be there in a minute," said Tim. He slipped past Aunt May, and ran up the stairs to the attic.

When he opened the door of his room, he saw that Nicola was alone.

"Where's Jeremy?" he asked.

"He's gone downstairs," said Nicola. "He'll be back soon."

"You have this up here," said Tim, putting the jam sandwiches on the table. "Have some of Melinda's cakes and apples, too. I'll have to have breakfast downstairs, but I won't be long."

He ran downstairs to the kitchen again.

Tim and Aunt May were just finishing breakfast, when the kitchen door was flung open, and Miss Miff burst in.

“You stole my bacon!” she cried, glaring at Tim. “What do you mean by it? Coming into my room, and stealing my bacon when I wasn’t looking!”

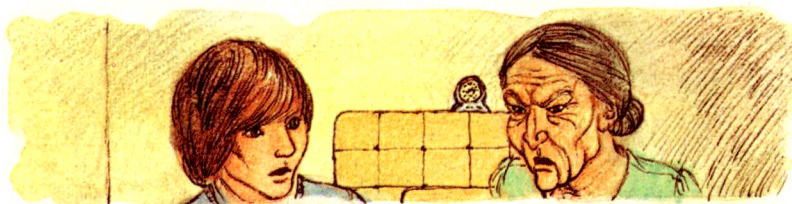
“I didn’t,” said Tim.

“Now then, Miss Miff,” said Aunt May. “No one’s stolen anything. Tim’s been having his breakfast.”

“Having my bacon for breakfast, you mean,” snapped Miss Miff. “There were four slices of bacon on my plate, when you came in with the tray. I got out of bed to put my dressing gown on, and when I got back, there was only one slice. *Somebody* took the other three slices, when I wasn’t looking! And it wasn’t the cat, because there isn’t one. Unless Tim’s been bringing that cat Sebastian in here again?”

“I haven’t,” said Tim. “It wasn’t Sebastian.”

“Then it was you,” snapped Miss Miff. “No one else would steal, in this house.”



“But . . .” began Aunt May. She stopped, and looked at Tim. “You did go back upstairs, Tim,” she said. “You didn’t touch Miss Miff’s bacon, did you?”

Tim shook his head.

“Perhaps a cat *did* get in,” said Aunt May. “Was your door open?”

“Yes it was,” said Miss Miff. “You left it open. You always do. I’m always asking you to shut the door.”

“Well, there you are,” said Aunt May. “I expect it was a cat. You go back to bed, Miss Miff. I’ll cook you some more bacon, and bring it up now.” She got up.

“I didn’t see any cat,” said Miss Miff. “I don’t believe a word that boy says. Not one word.”

She went out, banging the door behind her.



“Are you sure you didn’t let that cat in, Tim?” asked Aunt May, going over to the stove. “I know I shut her bedroom door. I remember doing it.”

“I didn’t,” said Tim.

“Oh well, I’ll just have to cook her some more, that’s all,” said Aunt May. “I’m sorry, Tim. It means we’ll have to go a bit short for tea tonight. We were going to have eggs and bacon for tea.”

Tim slipped out of the kitchen, and ran upstairs.



He could smell the bacon, as soon as he opened the door of his bedroom. Nicola and Jeremy were sitting on the floor, finishing the bread and jam. One slice of bacon lay on a paper bag in front of them.

They looked up as Tim came in, and Nicola smiled.

“Jeremy got some bacon,” she said. “We’ve saved a slice for you.”

Tim shut the door behind him.

“You shouldn’t have done it, Jeremy,” he said. “It was Miss Miff’s breakfast. Now Aunt May’s got to cook her some more, and we shan’t have any bacon for tea.”

“But she had four slices,” said Jeremy. “I only took one for each of us. I left her one too. And she had two eggs as well.”

“She pays for it,” said Tim. “It’s hers.”

“I don’t understand it a bit,” said Nicola. “Was she after you again?”

Tim nodded. “Yes,” he said. “But that doesn’t matter now. Only you mustn’t take anything again. *Please!*”

“All right, I won’t,” said Jeremy.

“Come and have your slice,” said Nicola.

Tim shook his head. “I can’t,” he said. “I told Aunt May I didn’t take it. And I didn’t. But Miss Miff didn’t believe me, and if I ate it now, it would be just as bad as if I had taken it.”

“I’m glad I’m one of the Hidden People,” said Jeremy. “I wouldn’t be you for anything.”

Nicola looked at Tim for a moment. Then she picked up the slice of bacon, pulled it in two, and handed the bigger bit to Jeremy. She ate the rest herself.

There were still some of Melinda’s cakes and apples on the table. Tim picked up the empty paper bag, and put them in it. Then he put the bag away in his drawer.

"I think we'd better go out," he said. "Then, if Melinda sends Knocker along today, he'll be able to find us. Come on."

Nicola and Jeremy finished the last little bits of bacon, and got up. Tim opened the door and looked out. There was no one there. He went downstairs with the two children at his heels. He took another careful look around when they got to the hall, but there was no sign of Miss Miff.

"She must be in her room," he whispered. "Come on." He looked back. He and Nicola were alone.

"Where's Jeremy?" he asked.

"Just coming," said Nicola, as Jeremy came down the stairs.

"Come on," said Tim. "Keep with me, Jeremy."

They slipped across the hall, out through the front door, and down the steps.

Mr. Berryman was just crossing The Yard. He was wearing an old apron and he had a paint brush in his hand.

"Hallo, Tim," he called out. "You're just the person I wanted to see."

Tim stopped. "Hallo, Mr. Berryman," he said.

"I'm painting the outside of my house, Tim," said Mr. Berryman. "I've done all the downstairs, and the next floor too. But I'm a bit too old to go right up to the top of the ladder. Would you do the attic windows for me?"

"Of course I will," said Tim. He liked Mr. Berryman.



“I’ve got the ladder set up around at the back,” said Mr. Berryman. “I’m doing the back of the house first. I’ll do the front next week.”

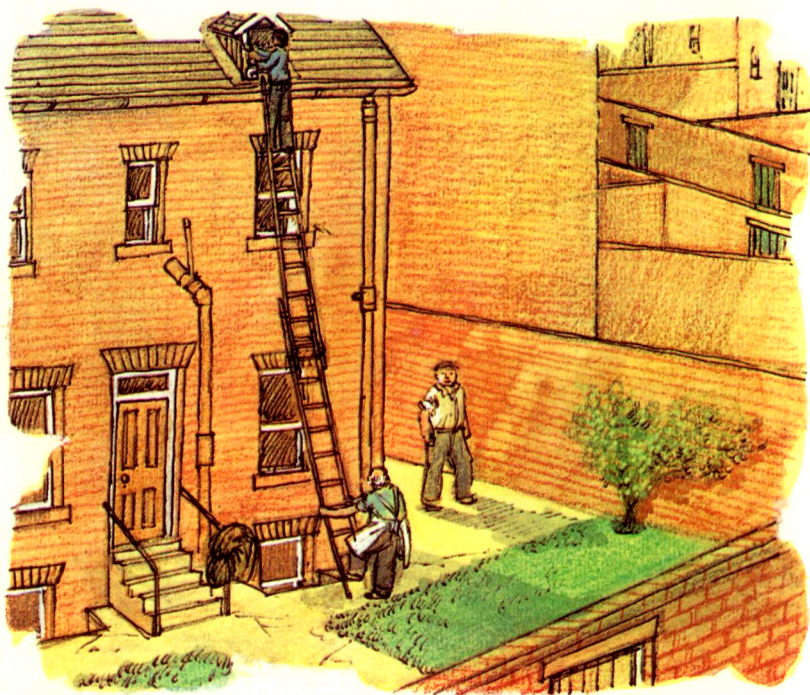
Mr. Berryman led the way through his front gate.

Tim turned to Nicola. “You and Jeremy stay here in The Yard,” he whispered. “Keep a look out for Knocker. I shan’t be long. Only don’t go out of The Yard, whatever happens.”

Nicola nodded. “We won’t,” she said.

Mr. Berryman looked back. “What did you say, Tim?” he asked. “I’m getting a bit hard of hearing these days.”

“Nothing,” said Tim. “I’m just coming.”



Mr. Berryman had set a long ladder up against the back of the house. The top of the ladder was near the attic window.

“I’ll hold the ladder, Tim,” said Mr. Berryman, handing Tim a brush and a pot of white paint.

Tim had helped Mr. Berryman with his painting before.

He climbed up the ladder. The ladder shook badly, and he was glad that Mr. Berryman was holding it. He had just started painting the wood around the attic window, when a man came round the side of the house.

“Mr. Berryman?” he asked. “I’ve come for that big chair you wanted mending.”

“I’ll come and help you with it,” said Mr. Berryman. “Come down, Tim. I’ve got to go inside for a minute or two, and I don’t want you up there unless I’m holding the ladder.”

Tim climbed down. He put the brush and the pot of paint down on the grass. Mr. Berryman went inside the house with the man.

Nicola and Jeremy came round the house, into the back garden.

“Haven’t you finished yet, Tim?” asked Nicola.

“I won’t be long,” said Tim.

Jeremy picked up the pot of paint and the brush.

“I can paint,” he said. “I’ll have a go.”

Before Tim could stop him, he was climbing up the ladder with the pot of paint in one hand.

“Come *down*, Jeremy,” said Tim. “They’ll be back in a minute.”

“No, they won’t,” said Nicola. “That chair will take them some time. It’s very big. I saw it through the window. Hold the ladder still, Tim. It’s shaking.”

Tim gripped the sides of the ladder, and put his foot on the lowest rung.

“Come on down, Jeremy,” he said.

Jeremy was busy painting. “In a minute,” he answered. “I’ll just finish this bit.”



Tim heard a noise in the back lane. The back gate opened, and a man came into the garden.

He nodded to Tim, and picked up the dustbin.

“Painting?” he asked.

Tim saw the man’s eyes move up the ladder. The man’s jaw fell. His eyes widened. He let out a yell, dropped the dustbin, and shot out of the garden into the back lane.

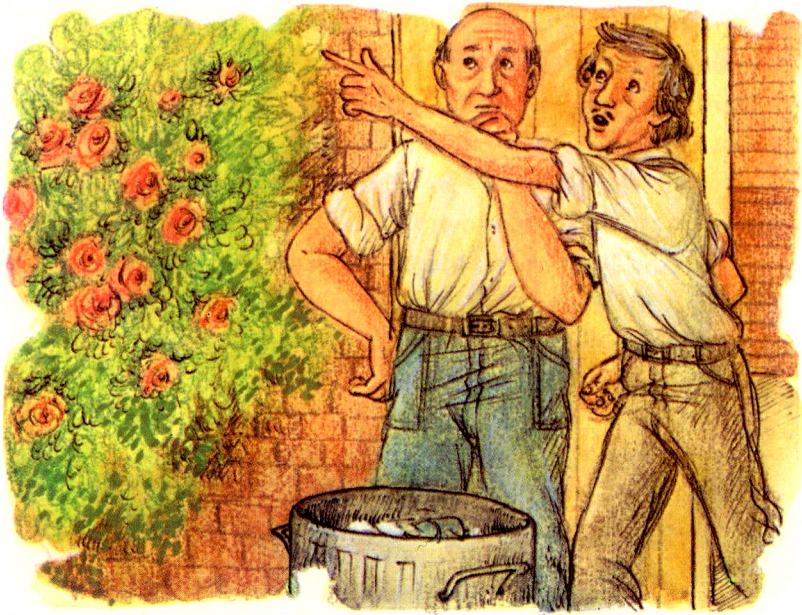
“Come *down*, Jeremy! He saw you,” cried Tim.

“No, he didn’t,” said Nicola, laughing. “That’s just the trouble. Jeremy is invisible. The man saw the brush painting the window by itself.”

“Come on down, Jeremy,” she called. “You’d better come down. He’s coming back.”

Jeremy came quickly down the ladder. He was laughing too. He put the pot of paint and the brush down on the grass, just as the dustman came rushing back into the garden with his mate.

“There!” he cried. “Look there, Jack. Up at that window.”



The two men stood by the open gate, staring upwards.

"There's nothing there that I can see, Bill," said Jack.

"But I tell you, the brush was painting all by itself," cried Bill.

"It couldn't have been," said Jack. "Look—it's on the grass."

"But I saw it," said Bill. "I saw it."

"Sunstroke," said Jack. "It's a hot day. You've been out too long."

He picked up the dustbin, and walked out of the gate with it. Bill followed. He was still saying: "But I saw it, I tell you," as they went off down the back lane.

Jack came back in a minute with the empty dustbin. He nodded to Tim.

"Sunstroke," he said again. "He's had it before."

He put the bin down, and went out, just as Mr. Berryman came back around the side of the house.

"Sorry about that, Tim," said Mr. Berryman. "Let's get on with that window."

Tim finished the window, without any more trouble. Nicola and Jeremy sat on the back steps, watching, but they didn't say anything.

Tim climbed down the ladder.



“Thanks, Tim,” said Mr. Berryman. “Now, you take this. You’ve earned it.” He held out two pound notes.

Tim shook his head. “That’s all right,” he said. “I’ll give you a hand any time, Mr. Berryman.”

“I know you will,” said Mr. Berryman. “But you take this, all the same. You’ve been doing a lot of odd jobs for me this summer. Come on, Tim. I mean it. It’s only fair.”

Tim thought of Nicola and Jeremy. He’d have to buy them something to eat.

“Thanks, Mr. Berryman,” he said, taking the money.

“That’s right,” said Mr. Berryman. “Now I shall feel I can ask you to help me again.”

Tim helped Mr. Berryman to put the ladder away. Then he cleaned his hands on a rag, and went back to The Yard. Nicola and Jeremy followed him. Mr. Berryman went inside.

“We’ll go and get something for supper,” he said. “This is going to help a lot. There’s a shop down the road. We can get some buns and cheese and things.”

“I’d rather have fish and chips,” said Jeremy.

“We’ve got to get things that will last,” said Tim. “And I can’t put fish and chips in my pocket.”

They went out of The Yard, and down the road to the shop at the corner. Tim felt almost cheerful. It would be much easier to have the children, if he had plenty for them to eat. He opened the door of the shop, and Nicola and Jeremy slipped through with him.

Nicola pointed to cheese and biscuits, bars of chocolate and buns and Tim got them. But he saved some of the money for another time. He didn't know how long the children were going to stay.

Tim pushed the packets of cheese and biscuits and chocolate into his pockets, and picked up the bag of buns. They went out of the shop, crossed the road, and walked back along the canal.

They had almost got to The Yard, when they saw two boys coming towards them. Tim stopped. One was Kevin, and the other was his older brother, Jim.

"Hallo," said Kevin. "Did you have a good swim yesterday?"

Tim said nothing. Kevin turned to Jim.

"Tim was afraid to go swimming," he said. "So I pushed him in."

Jim laughed. "Good for you," he said. "How would you like another swim today, Tim? Dive in and get that."

He knocked the bag of buns out of Tim's hand, and tossed it into the canal.

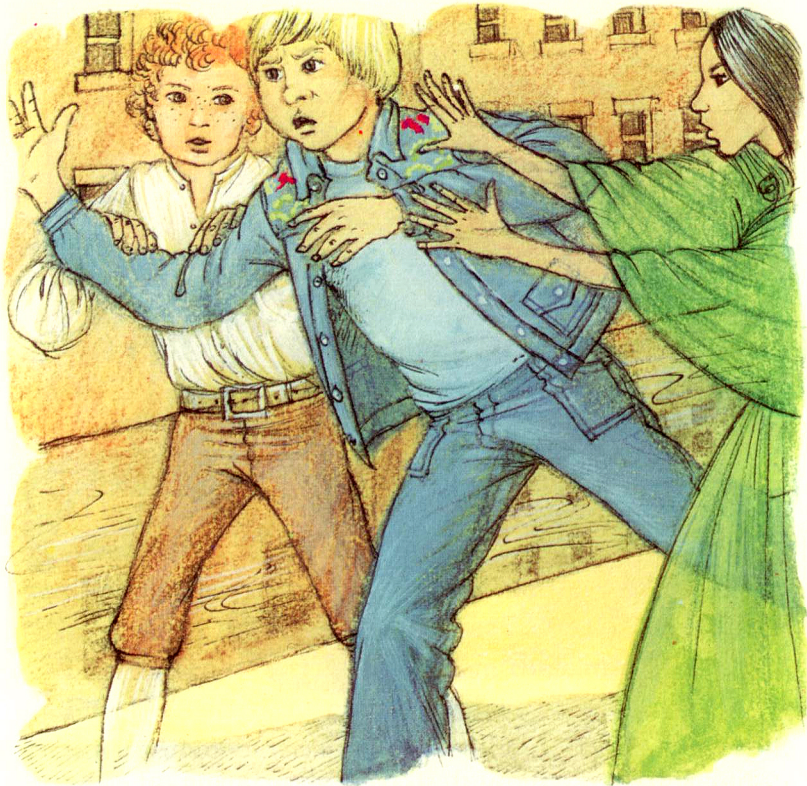
Tim hit out, but Jim was bigger than he was. Jim gripped Tim's arms, and held them against his sides.

"Give me a hand, Kevin," he said. "You get his legs, and we'll throw him in."

Tim kicked and struggled, but he couldn't break free.

Kevin made a grab at Tim's legs. But as he did so, he suddenly cried out, and slipped sideways.

Jeremy had grabbed his arm, and pulled hard.



As Kevin staggered back, Nicola pushed hard from the other side.

Kevin staggered towards the edge of the canal. Nicola gave him another push, and Jeremy jumped out of the way.

Kevin stood for a moment on the edge of the canal, his arms waving wildly in the air. Then with a big splash, he fell backwards into the water.



Jim let Tim go, and stood still, staring at Kevin. Kevin had come up, and was splashing his way to the bank.

Jeremy put down his head and charged into Jim. He used his head like a battering-ram, and Jim folded up with a yell. Then Nicola grabbed Jim's hair and jerked him sideways, and Jeremy went for his knees. Jim staggered towards the edge of the canal.

Nicola and Jeremy gave him a final push, and he fell into the water with an even bigger splash than Kevin.



“Whatever happened, Tim?” someone said behind them.

Tim turned round. Mr. Berryman was standing in the gap which led to The Yard, staring at him.

“They fell in,” said Tim.

“Well, I’ve never seen anything like that before,” said Mr. Berryman, crossing over the road to Tim. “Never in my life before, have I seen anything like that!”

There were shouts for help from the canal.

Tim looked down into the water.

Jim and Kevin were splashing about, trying to get out, but the canal bank was too high, and they couldn’t find anything to hold on to.

“We’d better pull them out,” said Mr. Berryman. “Give me a hand, Tim.”

Mr. Berryman bent down, and held his hand out to Kevin. Tim leant over the canal, and gripped Kevin’s other hand.

“Pull!” said Mr. Berryman.

They pulled. Kevin kicked wildly for a moment, found a foothold, and struggled on to the pavement.



“Now the other one,” said Mr. Berryman, as Kevin lay there, panting.

Tim and Mr. Berryman bent down, gripped Jim’s hands, and pulled him up too. Jim struggled over the side, and on to the pavement beside Kevin. They sat there, dripping, trying to get their breath.

“Well,” said Mr. Berryman, looking down at them. “Let that be a lesson to both of you. I saw you toss Tim’s buns into the canal. I’ll trouble you to pay for them, too.”

He held out his hand.

Without a word, Jim pushed his hand into his wet pocket, pulled out some coins, and gave them to Mr. Berryman.

Mr. Berryman handed the money to Tim. “You’d better be off home,” he said to Jim and Kevin.

The two boys got up. Jim took a step towards Tim. “You haven’t heard the last of this. You just wait!” he said.

“Now then,” said Mr. Berryman. “You leave Tim alone. I saw what happened.”

“That’s more than I did,” muttered Kevin.

The two boys set off up the road, and across the bridge.

"You'd better keep clear of them for a bit, Tim," said Mr. Berryman, looking after them. "I don't like the look of them at all."

"I will if I can," said Tim. He didn't need Mr. Berryman to tell him to keep clear of Jim and Kevin. He knew they would try and get their own back, if they could.

They all walked back to The Yard.

"Well, I never!" said Mr. Berryman, shaking his head. He was still shaking it when he said "Goodbye", and turned into his own house.

Tim took the children back to Aunt May's.

As soon as they were all three safely in the attic again, with the door shut, Nicola began to dance. She spun round, laughing and clapping her hands with delight.

Jeremy stood at one side, grinning cheerfully.

Tim sat down on the bed. "You two know how to fight, all right," he said.

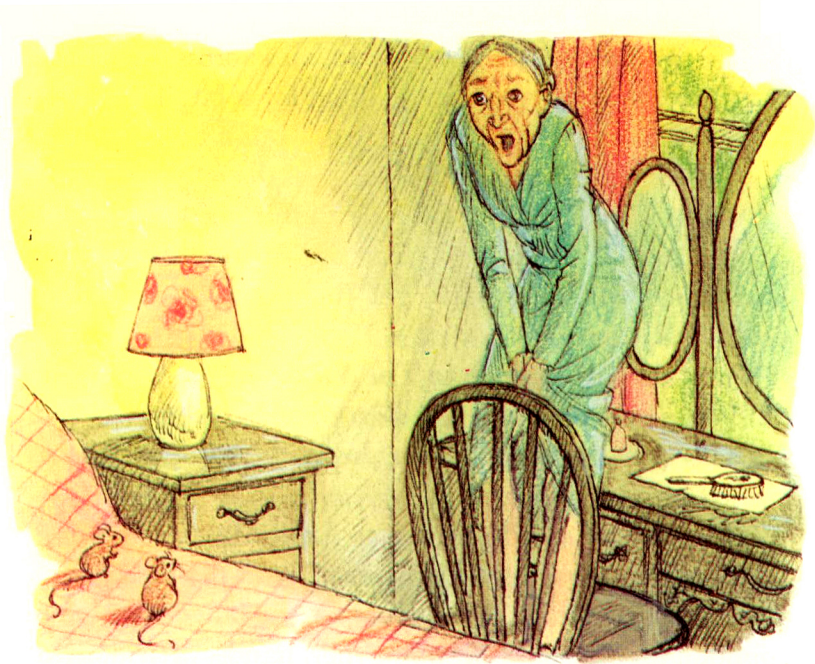
"It was easy," said Jeremy. "They couldn't see us."

Nicola burst out laughing. "Did you see their faces when we pushed them in?" she cried.

There was a sudden scream from downstairs.

"Go away! Help! Take them away! Kill them! Help!"

Tim rushed to the door, tore it open, and ran downstairs. The screams were getting louder. They were coming from Miss Miff's room.



Aunt May came running up from the basement, and they rushed into Miss Miff's room together.

Miss Miff was standing on a chair, screaming and holding her skirt.

Two mice were sitting on her bed, looking at her.

Tim ran to the bed. The mice didn't seem to be very frightened, and they let Tim catch them.

"Take them out and drown them," said Aunt May. "Be quick, Tim. I'll look after Miss Miff."

Tim took the mice outside into The Yard. He looked around carefully, to make sure that Sebastian wasn't there, and then he let them go.



As he came back into the hall, he heard Miss Miff in her room, talking to Aunt May. She sounded as if she was very excited. She was talking so loudly, that he couldn't help hearing what she was saying.

"It's no good," cried Miss Miff. "It's that boy or me. One of us has got to go. I won't live in the same house with that boy any longer."

"Tim wouldn't put mice in your bed, Miss Miff," said Aunt May. "I'm sure he wouldn't."

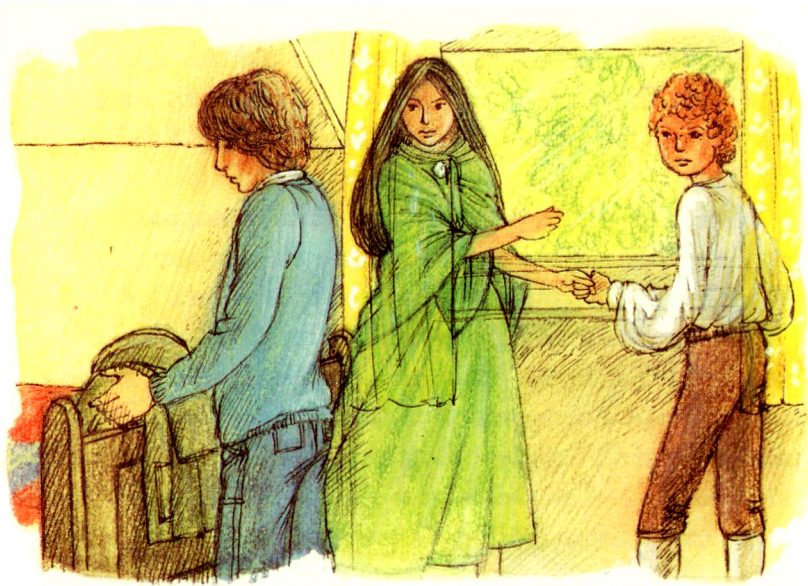
"Of course he did," snapped Miss Miff. "They were right, *in the bed—in my bed!* I've never seen a mouse in this house before. I wouldn't stay here, if you had mice. I hate them. I've always hated them. Tim knows I do. I don't know where he got them, but he put them in my bed, or my name's not Mabel Miff! And I won't have it. I won't stay, I tell you. First he steals my bacon, and then he puts mice in my bed. I'm leaving. I won't put up with it, I tell you. It's too much."



Tim stood still, as if turned to stone. He had told Melinda that he couldn't leave Aunt May. He felt that he had to stay and help her. But he wasn't helping Aunt May at all. She'd be much better off, if he wasn't there. If Miss Miff left, Aunt May wouldn't have the money to pay the rent for the house. Aunt May would have to leave, and where could she go? Miss Miff would never believe that he hadn't put the mice in her bed. And, in a way, he had. He hadn't done it himself, but Jeremy must have put them there, and he'd let Jeremy stay in the house.

"I won't stay in this house, if that boy stays here. I won't, I tell you. I won't!" he heard Miss Miff shouting.

Tim slipped across the hall, and went slowly upstairs.



Nicola and Jeremy were standing by the window. They turned round as he opened the door.

Nicola had been laughing, but she stopped when she saw Tim's face.

"What is it?" she asked. "What's wrong?"

"Miss Miff says she's leaving," said Tim.

"Good job too," said Jeremy.

"But Aunt May can't pay the rent of this house, without Miss Miff's money," said Tim unhappily. "You shouldn't have put those mice in her bed, Jeremy. I told you to leave her alone."

"But she's so unfair," said Nicola.

"I know she is," said Tim. "But that won't help Aunt May."

“Was that her yelling?” asked Jeremy.

Tim nodded.

“I’m sorry, Tim,” said Nicola. “I didn’t think she’d go. I didn’t think it would matter if she did.”

“She thinks it was me,” said Tim, “and she won’t stay in the same house with me any longer. I wish Knocker would come. I’ve got to see Melinda.”

“I was just going to tell you, Tim. Melinda’s here,” said Nicola. “Look!” She turned back to the window, and pointed down into The Yard. “She’s down there, under the tree.”



“What!” cried Tim, running to the window. “*Melinda’s* here? Melinda herself? She said she’d send Knocker.”

He looked down. Melinda was standing under the old tree in the middle of The Yard, looking up at the window.

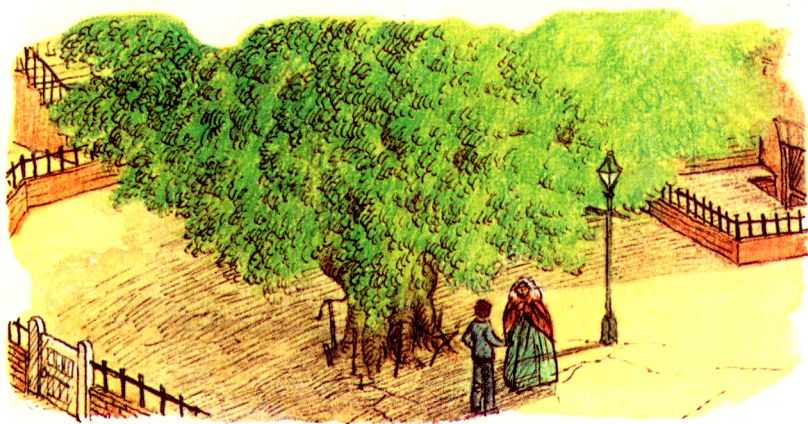
“You stay here,” said Tim. “And this time, *stay* here. I’m going out to see Melinda.”

He ran out of the room and down the stairs. When he came to the hall, he stopped for a moment, listening. Aunt May was still in Miss Miff's room. He could hear them talking.

Tim slipped out of the front door. He shut it softly behind him, and ran across The Yard to Melinda.

"Where's Knocker?" asked Tim, as he ran up.

"I had to come myself, Tim," said Melinda. "It wasn't safe to send Knocker. The wind witches have come. They're in the wood, and they would have followed Knocker here. They tried to follow me. They didn't see me come this time, but it won't be long before they find out where the children are. They must start at once, Tim. If you can't go with them, they'll have to go alone. We can't wait until I find someone else. They must go at once. I'll see them safely out of the town, and on their way."





Tim took a deep breath.

"I'll take them, if you'll tell me the way," he said.

Melinda looked at him. Her eyes seemed to look right inside him. She said nothing for a moment. Then she nodded her head.

"I'm glad," she said. "I'm very glad, Tim. It will be dangerous, but if they're with you, they may get there. Go and get them now. Bring anything you need with you. But don't bring more than you can carry. We must set out at once."

Tim ran back to the house. Nicola and Jeremy were waiting for him in the attic.

“Come on,” he said. “We’ve got to start now.”

He picked up his jacket and put it on. Then he took the paper bag with the cakes and apples out of the drawer, and pushed it into his old school bag. He pulled the packets of biscuits, cheese and chocolate out of his pockets.

As he did so, the old coin with the hole in the middle, that Melinda had given him, fell out of his pocket on to the floor.

Tim picked it up. He took some string from the table, pushed one end through the coin, and tied the two ends of the string together. Then he hung the coin round his neck, under his clothes.

He put the packets of chocolate, biscuits and cheese in his bag, and slung it over his shoulder.

There was a pencil and a pad of paper in the drawer. Tim took them out. He didn’t want Aunt May to worry about him.

“I’m going away for a bit, till Miss Miff cools off,” he wrote on the pad. “I know you need her rent, and she won’t stay if I’m here. Don’t worry. I’ll be all right. Tim.”

As he put the note on the table by his bed, he saw his candle and matches. He pushed them into his pocket, and turned towards the door.

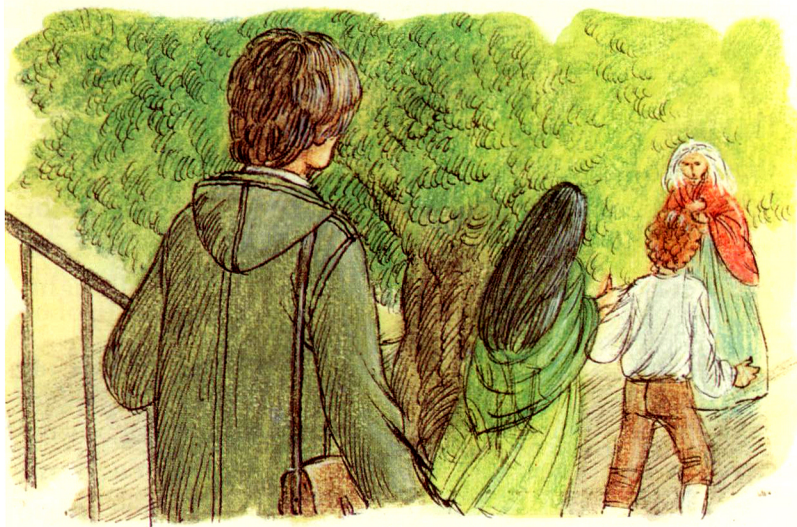
Nicola and Jeremy were standing watching him. They didn't say a word, but Tim could see that Nicola was frightened.

"It's all right," he said. "You're not going alone. I'm coming with you. We'll get there somehow. Come on. Melinda's waiting for us."

As they crept across the hall, Tim heard Miss Miff say loudly: "No, no, no! I won't stay in the same house as that boy!"

Tim opened the front door. They slipped out, and he shut it softly behind them.

The three of them ran down the steps and across The Yard, to where Melinda stood waiting for them under the old tree.



FLIGHTPATH TO READING

A Series

1. Tim and Tobias
2. All the Fun of the Fair
3. Tim Meets Captain Jory
4. Tim and the Smugglers
5. Tim and the Witches
6. The Highwayman
7. Magic in The Yard
8. The Key

B Series

1. The Return of the Key
2. Captain Jory Lends a Hand
3. The Stump People
4. Watchers in The Yard
5. Red for Danger
6. At the House of the Safe Witch
7. Tim in Hiding
8. On the Night of the Full Moon

C Series

1. The Pool by the Whispering Trees
2. Tim in Trouble
3. On the Road to the North
4. Riding into Danger
5. Mandrake's Castle
6. Escape by Night
7. Three Fires on the Dark Tower
8. Tim Rides on the Ghost Bus

D Series

1. News from the North
2. The Cry in the Dark
3. The Shield Stone
4. The Storm over the Sea
5. The Cave of the Wind Witches
6. In Diaman's Cave
7. Danger on the Moor
8. At the Hill of the Stone Prisons

Flightpath to Reading C2

E-G



ARNOLD-WEATON